

Public Affairs Support Annex

Coordinating Department

Office of Communications

Cooperating Agencies

All Departments

I. Introduction

A. Purpose

This annex describes the interagency policies and procedures used to rapidly mobilize assets to prepare and deliver coordinated and sustained messages to the public in response to major emergencies or disasters.

B. Scope

This annex establishes mechanisms to prepare and deliver coordinated and sustained messages regarding potential or actual emergencies or disasters and provides for acknowledgement of an incident and communication of emergency information to the public during emergency operations. This annex is integrated with and supported through the ESF #15 – External Affairs resource management structure.

C. Policies

Emergency communications incorporates the following processes:

1. **Control:** Identification of emergency communications coordinating, primary and supporting departments and agency roles, and authorities for release of information.
2. **Coordination:** Specification of interagency coordination and plans, notifications, activation, and supporting protocols.
3. **Communications:** Development of message content such as incident facts, health risk concerns, pre-incident and post-incident preparedness recommendations, warning issues, incident information, messages, audiences, and strategies for when, where, how and by whom the messages will be delivered.

General guidance on the authority to release information is in accordance with existing plans, operational security, law enforcement protocols, designated coordinating and primary department assignments, and current procedures.

II. Concept of Operations

A. General

The Public Information Officer (PIO) is to be notified of all emergency situations that require notification of the City Manager.

When an emergency is officially declared, the Public Information Officer will serve as the primary source of contact for release of information to the media. Any media contacting the emergency communications center or Emergency Operations Center shall be referred to the PIO. This will allow emergency personnel to use their resources for responding to the event and give the media one source to contact for details. This does not preclude emergency personnel from responding to media inquiries on the scene, although caution should be used in releasing details of injuries or death before families can be notified.

Communicating information regarding the incident to the public is a critical component of incident management and must be fully integrated with all other operational actions to ensure the following objectives are met:

1. Delivery of incident preparedness, health, response, and recovery instructions to those directly affected by the incident; and
2. Dissemination of incident information to the general public.

Establishing communications paths with participants is a primary objective during the first minutes of plan activation. These paths provide a streamlined process to ensure that appropriate participants and decision makers are linked together to manage emergency communications with the public.

Agencies should agree on releases, talking points, and sustaining communications effort and strategy.

Public Affairs representatives may visit the incident site to gain facts, provide operational response updates and to assist the media in covering the incident.

Contact key news media to inform them about the incident and its status, provide initial information to counter speculation and rumors, and make available, where necessary or known, immediate health and safety guidance. Departments and agencies should closely coordinate media queries during this critical phase to ensure that approved messages are executed.

Participating radio stations serving the locality are listed at Tab 2. The use of cable television during emergency situations is described in Tab 1. The Public Information Officer in coordination with the local EOC should also access these local stations to advise the public concerning locally unique emergency public information.

Once an emergency has been declared, separate emergency response organizations will coordinate with the Public Information Officer and clear news releases with the EOC before release to the news media for public consumption. The PIO may establish a Joint Information Center (JIC).

The news media must assure that confusing or conflicting information is not disseminated to the public. Sources of information should be verified for accuracy. All statements from local and state government personnel should be from, or authenticated by, the proper authorities. The news media will, in effect, assume a support role to local government during emergency operations.

Newspapers should be requested to publish articles periodically in order to increase public awareness about the primary local hazards and to suggest the best protective actions for individuals in time of emergency.

B. Organization:

The Public Information Officer will disseminate emergency public information as requested by the Director of Emergency Management, the Coordinator of Emergency Management or the Deputy Coordinator of Emergency Services. The PIO will work jointly with, and have official access to, local radio stations and newspapers. The PIO role may shift to the City Manager, the Mayor, the Fire Chief, or other department heads, depending on the type of incident and the circumstances involved.

The Public Information Officer will report to the emergency operations center or to the City Manager's Office, or establish a Joint Information Center (JIC), whichever is appropriate at the time of the emergency. The PIO will coordinate the release of information over the government access cable channel and through all written documents. The PIO will also be responsible for arranging regular briefings for the media at a suitable time and location. Any complaints by emergency personnel concerning actions by members of the press are also to be referred to the PIO for discussion with the appropriate news organization.

The PIO will maintain an up-to-date telephone and fax number list for all local news organizations and will remain accessible by telephone throughout the duration of the emergency situation.

The Emergency Alert System (EAS) will broadcast state-level emergency public information. The Virginia EOC has the primary responsibility of keeping the public informed when the emergency affects a widespread area. This will supplement information provided by the National Weather Service.

III. Responsibilities

A. Primary Department (Office of Communications)

1. Plans, prepares, and executes local leadership and ESF #15 resource management during emergencies and disasters;
2. Coordinates plans, processes, and provides resource support of field operations for emergency communications with the public through ESF #15;
3. Designates a Public Affairs representative to support the operation;
4. Coordinates plans and process for emergency communications with the public with local and state agencies and nongovernmental organizations; and
5. Disseminates information related to incidents to the public.

Tab 1 to Public Affairs Support Annex

Use of Television, internet, and Radio During Emergency Situations

During emergencies, it is especially important that the public be kept informed of available resources, dangerous conditions, and the response that emergency personnel are making to the situation. In addition to using other media outlets, cable television, local access, and the internet should be used to disseminate this type of information as follows:

1. Emergency Access - The emergency override on the RVTV system allows the Emergency Services Coordinator and the Public Information Officer to inform the public of immediate crisis situations.
2. Roanoke Alert - The emergency webpage/override is available to display emergency information, phone numbers, and situation updates. This website functions in several different ways. For small-scale events such as localized flooding or a hazardous materials incident, the center picture on www.roanokeva.gov would change and have a red background with emergency information posted in white. Users can click on that center panel to link to a page with more detailed information. In the case of a large-scale event the website www.roanokealert.com
3. Government Access Alert Equipment – Various display equipment maintained around the City will be available for mobile use when necessary, to display information for later broadcast or for live broadcast from one of the insertion points located throughout the County. The insertion points in the locality are:

Civic Center Marquees
Municipal Building Lobby
Main Library
Patrick Henry High School

EMERGENCY PUBLIC INFORMATION RESOURCES

MEDIA	CONTACT/TELEPHONE
Newspapers	
Radio Stations	
Television Stations	